



Press Release

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
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Major winter storms last year demonstrate need to prepare for cold, snow and ice during Winter Storm Preparedness Week Nov. 11-17

IEMA, National Weather Service and American Red Cross join with Gov. Blagojevich's Keep Warm Illinois campaign to help people stay safe this winter

SPRINGFIELD – It's been less than a year since a major snow and ice storm barreled through much of Illinois, downing trees and power lines and leaving more than 400,000 people without power for several days during frigid temperatures. The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), the National Weather Service (NWS) and the American Red Cross hope the lessons learned from that severe winter storm remind people of the importance of preparing for winter weather this year.

The three organizations are joining with Governor Rod R. Blagojevich's *Keep Warm Illinois* campaign again this year to encourage Illinoisans to prepare now for severe winter weather during the annual Winter Storm Preparedness Week, November 11-17.

"As we saw last year, severe winter weather can trap people in their homes without heat or power for several days," said IEMA Director Andrew Velasquez III. "With such treacherous conditions affecting a large area, as we experienced last year, it could be a few days before you can leave your home or help arrives. Situations like this can turn deadly unless you have some basic necessities on hand – like food, water, flashlights and blankets – to keep you and your family safe and warm."

Last year's ice and snow storm began on Nov. 30 and lasted into Dec. 1. When it was over, nearly half of the state was covered with either record snowfalls or heavy ice accumulations. Thousands of homes in some areas hit by the ice storm were out of power for up to 10 days as crews repaired power lines downed by ice-laden branches and trees. To ensure the safety of residents in areas without power, Gov. Blagojevich ordered more than 350 troops from the Illinois Army National Guard to conduct door-to-door checks of nearly 17,000 homes in the

Metro East and Macon county areas. The American Red Cross set up several shelters throughout the area to provide meals and a warm place to stay for many who left their frigid homes.

Eighteen Illinois counties hard-hit by heavy ice accumulations were declared federal disaster areas, and 26 counties that received record snowfalls were approved for federal snow assistance. Those declarations enabled local governments to receive reimbursement for some of their extraordinary storm-response and recovery efforts.

The 2006 early-winter storm, as well as blizzard in mid-February 2007 that dropped a foot or more of snow throughout Central Illinois, won't soon be forgotten by anyone who endured the tough winter weather. But winter storms are not unusual in Illinois. According to the NWS, there has not been a winter in Illinois without a severe winter storm in the past century. The state experiences an average of five severe winter storms each year.

One important step toward staying safe during winters in Illinois is to keep up-to-date with changing weather conditions. Using sophisticated scientific equipment and trained meteorologists, the NWS is able to track approaching weather systems before they reach Illinois, and issues watches or warnings that provide potentially life-saving advance notice of bad weather.

"When the National Weather Service issues a Winter Storm Watch up to two days prior to an anticipated winter storm, people need to use that advanced notice to get the things they need in case they are stranded in their homes, or alter their travel plans to avoid being caught unprepared," said Chris Miller, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the NWS in Lincoln.

As many Illinoisans experienced last year, a severe winter storm could prevent you from leaving your home for several days, perhaps leaving you without electricity or heat. A basic home preparedness kit can help you get through winter storms and other emergencies throughout the year. Items in the kit should include:

- Three-day supply of non-perishable food, including high energy foods such as dried fruit and candy
- Bottled water (one gallon per family member per day for three days)
- Battery-operated radio, NOAA weather radio and extra batteries
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Extra medications and special items for babies, the disabled and the elderly

"After ensuring the safety of your family, check on neighbors who may need assistance," advises Amy Eden, Coordinator, Chapter Operations and Response, American Red Cross - Illinois Capital Area Chapter.

It's also important to exercise extreme caution when traveling during the winter months. During last year's snow and ice storm, hundreds of travelers were stranded in rest areas on I-80 and I-74 without food or water. Using an Illinois National Guard Blackhawk helicopter, an Illinois Department of Transportation truck, Illinois Department of Natural Resources snowmobiles and

an Illinois State Police four-wheel drive vehicle, 400 meals were delivered to stranded travelers at two rest areas to help them get by until they were able to get back on the road.

Before setting out on a trip, check the latest weather conditions along your travel route and make sure tires, wipers, and lights are in good condition. Start your trip with a full tank of gas, provide your itinerary to a friend, relative or co-worker, and if possible, travel during daylight hours on main roads. While on the road, be prepared to turn back and seek shelter if conditions become threatening. Keep windows clear of snow and ice and adjust speed for road conditions.

Now is the time to equip your car with a winter car survival kit stocked with items that can keep you safe and warm if you should become stranded alongside a road. A car survival kit should include the following:

- Cell phone and charger
- First aid kit
- Water and high-calorie, non-perishable food
- Boots, hats, gloves and extra clothing to keep dry
- Blanket
- Crank radio and flashlight
- Sack of sand or cat litter
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Tool kit
- Tow rope
- Booster cables
- Compass and road maps
- A small can and waterproof matches to melt snow for drinking water

To learn more about winter preparedness, IEMA, NWS and the American Red Cross developed a *Winter Storm Preparedness Guide*, which is available on the IEMA website at www.state.il.us/iema or by calling (217) 785-9888. The guide includes many more tips on how to stay safe in your home and car, as well as information about winter weather terms, frostbite and hypothermia.

In addition, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation advises that winter storms pose special hazards to homes and vehicles in Illinois. High winds, ice and snow can cause structural damage to homes and garages. Frigid temperatures can cause pipes in outside walls to freeze and burst. Slick roads and slower reaction times cause traffic accidents and damage to cars and trucks. Fall is an ideal time to review homeowners' and auto insurance policies to assess whether coverage is adequate and that policy holders understand exactly what their insurance covers.

The *Keep Warm Illinois* website (www.keepwarm.illinois.gov) offers no-cost and low-cost energy saving tips, a web-based tool to conduct a home energy audit, links to energy assistance programs and other resources. In addition, the *Keep Warm Illinois* hotline (877-411-WARM) is another resource for Illinois residents to learn how to save energy and get energy assistance.